

More on ‘Ā’isha’s Age at the Time of Her Marriage

A Dialogue Between “The Learner” and Shaykh Gibril F. Haddad

Shawwāl 1425 / December 2004

“They continue to call this ‘often a disputed subject’
because their hearts refuse to accept the evidence.”

-- Shaykh Gibril F. Haddad

“The Learner”:

To begin with, I think it is the responsibility of all those who believe that marrying a girl as young as nine years old was an accepted norm of the Arab culture, to provide at least a few examples to substantiate their point of view. I have not yet been able to find a single dependable instance in the books of Arab history where a girl as young as nine years old was given away in marriage. Unless such examples are given, we do not have any reasonable grounds to believe that it really was an accepted norm.

G. F. Haddad:

Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim:

- Abu Tughlub ibn Hamdan married the daughter of `Izz al-Dawla Bakhtyar when she was three and paid a dowry of 100,000 dinars. This took place in Safar 360 H. (*Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil*).
- Al-Shafi`i in al-Umm reported that he saw countless examples of nine-year old pubescent girls in Yemen. Al-Bayhaqi also narrates it from him in the *Sunan al-Kubra* as does al-Dhahabi in the Siyar.
- Al-Bayhaqi narrated with his chains in his *Sunan al-Kubra* no less than three examples of Muslim wives that gave birth at age nine or ten.
- Hisham ibn `Urwa himself (whom the objector claims to know enough to forward the most barefaced judgments on his reliability) married Fatima bint al-Mundhir when she was nine years old (*al-Muntazam* and *Tarikh Baghdad*).
- Our liege-lord `Umar married Umm Kulthum the daughter of `Ali and Fatima at a similar age per `Abd al-Razzaq, Ibn `Abd al-Barr and others.
- And our Mother `Aisha herself was first almost betrothed to Jubayr ibn Mut`im before her father dropped that option when he received word from the Messenger of Allah, Allah bless and greet him and be well-pleased with them. [Although the authenticity of this report is questionable.]

“The Learner”:

In my opinion, the age of Ayesha (ra) has been grossly mis-reported in the ahadith. Not only that, I think that the narratives reporting this event are not only highly unreliable but also that on the basis of other historical data, the event reported, is quite an unlikely happening. Let us look at the issue from an objective stand point. My reservations in accepting the narratives, on the basis of which, Ayeshas (ra) age at the time of her marriage with the Prophet (pbuh) is held to be nine years are:

- Most of these narratives are reported only by Hisham ibn `urwah reporting on the authority of his father. An event as well known as the one being reported, should logically have been reported by more people than just one, two or three. Try more than eleven authorities among the *Tabi`in* that reported it directly from A'isha, not counting the other major Companions that reported the same, nor other major Successors that reported it from other than `A'isha.
- It is quite strange that no one from Medinah, where Hisham ibn `urwah lived the first seventy one years of his life has narrated the event, even though in Medinah his pupils included people as well known as Malik ibn Anas.

G. F. Haddad:

Not so. Al-Zuhri also reports it from `Urwa, from `A'isha; so does `Abd Allah ibn Dhakwan – both major Madanis. So is the *Tabi`i* Yahya al-Lakhmi who reports it from her in the *Musnad* and in Ibn Sa`d's *Tabaqat*. So is Abu Ishaq Sa`d ibn Ibrahim who reports it from Imam al-Qasim ibn Muhammad – one of the Seven Imams of Madina – from `A'isha.

“The Learner”:

All the narratives of this event have been reported by narrators from Iraq, where Hisham is reported to have had shifted after living in Medinah for seventy one years.

G. F. Haddad:

Not so. In addition to the above four Madinese *Tabi`in* narrators, Sufyan ibn `Uyayna – from Khurasan – and `Abd Allah ibn Muhammad ibn Yahya – from Tabarayya in Palestine – both report it. Nor was this hadith reported only by `Urwa but also by `Abd al-Malik ibn `Umayr, al-Aswad, Ibn Abi Mulayka, Abu Salama ibn `Abd al-Rahman ibn `Awf, Yahya ibn `Abd al-Rahman ibn Hatib, Abu `Ubayda (Amir ibn `Abd Allah ibn Mas`ud) and others of the *Tabi`i* Imams directly from `A'isha.

This makes the report mass-transmitted (*mutawatir*) from `A'isha by over eleven authorities among the *Tabi`in*, not counting the other major Companions that reported the same, such as Ibn Mas`ud nor other major Successors that reported it from other than `A'isha, such as Qatada!

“The Learner”:

Tehzibu'l-tehzib, one of the most well known books on the life and reliability of the narrators of the traditions of the Prophet (pbuh) reports that according to Yaqub ibn Shaibah: "narratives reported by Hisham are reliable except those that are reported through the people of Iraq". It further states that Malik ibn Anas objected on those narratives of Hisham which were reported through people of Iraq. (vol 11, pg 48 - 51)

G. F. Haddad:

Rather, Ya`qub said: "*Trustworthy, thoroughly reliable (thiqa thabt), above reproach except after he went to Iraq, at which time he narrated overly from his father and was criticized for it.*" Notice that Ya`qub does not exactly endorse that criticism.

As for Malik, he reports over one hundred hadiths from Hisham (as is evident in the two *Sahihs* and *Sunan*!) to the point that al-Dhahabi questions the authenticity of his alleged criticism of Hisham.

Indeed, none among the hadith Masters endorsed these reservations since they were based solely on the fact that Hisham in his last period (he was 71 at the time of his last trip to Iraq), for the sake of brevity, would say “*My father, from `A`isha*” (*abi `an `A`isha*) and no longer pronounced, “*narrated to me*” (*haddathani*).

Al-Mizzi in *Tahdhib al-Kamal* (30:238) explained that it became a foregone conclusion for the Iraqis that Hisham did not narrate anything from his father except what he had heard directly from him.

Ibn Hajar also dismisses the objections against Hisham ibn `Urwa as negligible in *Tahdhib al-Tahdhib* (11:45), saying: “*It was clear enough to the Iraqis that he did not narrate from his father other than what he had heard directly from him.*”

In fact, to say that “*narratives reported by Hisham ibn `Urwa are reliable except those that are reported through the people of Iraq*” is ***major nonsense*** as that would eliminate all narrations of Ayyub al-Sakhtyani from him since Ayyub was a Basran Iraqi, and those of Abu `Umar al-Nakha`i who was from Kufa, and those of Hammad ibn Abi Sulayman from Kufa (the Shaykh of Abu Hanifa), and those of Hammad ibn Salama and Hammad ibn Zayd both from Basra, and those of Sufyan al-Thawri from Basra, and those of Shu`ba in Basra, all of whom narrated from Hisham!

“The Learner”:

Mizanu'l-ai`tidal, another book on the narrators of the traditions of the Prophet (pbuh) reports that when he was old, Hisham's memory suffered quite badly. (vol 4, pg 301 - 302)

G. F. Haddad:

An outright lie, on the contrary, al-Dhahabi in *Mizan al-`I`tidal* (4:301 #9233) states: “*Hisham ibn `Urwa, one of the eminent personalities. A Proof in himself, and an Imam. However, in his old age his memory diminished, but he certainly never became confused. Nor should any attention be paid to what Abu al-Hasan ibn al-Qattan said about him and Suhayl ibn Abi Salih becoming confused or changing! Yes, the man changed a little bit and his memory was not the same as it had been in his younger days, so that he forgot some of what he had memorized or lapsed, so what? Is he immune to forgetfulness? [p. 302] And when he came to Iraq in the last part of his life he narrated a great amount of knowledge, in the course of which are a few narrations in which he did not excel, and such occurs also to Malik, and Shu`ba, and Waki`, and the major trustworthy masters. So spare yourself confusion and floundering, do not mix the firmly-established Imams with the weak and muddled narrators. Hisham is a Shaykh al-Islam. But may Allah console us well of you, O Ibn al-Qattan, and the same with regard to `Abd al-Rahman ibn Khirash's statement from Malik!*”

“The Learner”:

According to the generally accepted tradition, Ayesha (ra) was born about eight years before Hijrah. But according to another narrative in Bukhari (kitabu'l-tafseer) Ayesha (ra) is reported to have said that at the time Surah Al-Qamar, the 54th chapter of the Qur'an, was revealed, “I was a young girl”. The 54th surah of the Qur'an was revealed nine years before Hijrah.

G. F. Haddad:

Not true. The hadith Masters, Sira historians, and Qur'anic commentators agree that the splitting of the moon took place about five years before the Holy Prophet's (upon him blessings and peace) Hijra to Madina. Thus it is confirmed that our Mother `Aisha was born between seven and eight years before the Hijra and the words that she was a *jariya* or little girl five years before the Hijra match the fact that her age at the time Surat al-Qamar was revealed was around two or three A.H.

"The Learner":

According to this tradition, Ayesha (ra) had not only been born before the revelation of the referred surah, but was actually a young girl (jariyah), not an infant (sibyah) at that time. Obviously, if this narrative is held to be true, it is in clear contradiction with the narratives reported by Hisham ibn `urwah. I see absolutely no reason that after the comments of the experts on the narratives of Hisham ibn `urwah, why we should not accept this narrative to be more accurate.

G. F. Haddad:

A two year old is not an infant. A two year old is able to run around, which is what jariya means. As for "*the comments of the experts*" they concur on 6 or 7 as the age of marriage and 9 as the age of cohabitation.

"The Learner":

According to a number of narratives, Ayesha (ra) accompanied the Muslims in the battle of Badr and Uhud. Furthermore, it is also reported in books of hadith and history that no one under the age of 15 years was allowed to take part in the battle of Uhud. All the boys below 15 years of age were sent back. Ayesha's (ra) participation in the battle of Badr and Uhud clearly indicate that she was not nine or ten years old at that time. After all, women used to accompany men to the battle fields to help them, not to be a burden on them.

G. F. Haddad:

First, the prohibition applied to combatants. It applied neither to non-combatant boys nor to non-combatant girls and women. Second, `Aisha did not participate in Badr at all but bade farewell to the combatants as they were leaving Madina, as narrated by Muslim in his *Sahih*. On the day of Uhud (year 3), Anas – at the time only twelve or thirteen years old – reports seeing an eleven-year old `A'isha and his mother Umm Sulaym having tied up their dresses and carrying water skins back and forth to the combatants, as narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

"The Learner":

According to almost all the historians Asma, the elder sister of Ayesha was ten years older than Ayesha.

G. F. Haddad:

Well, Ibn Kathir based himself on Ibn Abi al-Zinad's assertion that she was ten years older than `A'isha, however, al-Dhahabi in *Siyar A`lam al-Nubala'* said there was a greater difference than 10 years between the two, up to 19, and he is more reliable here.

"The Learner":

It is reported in Taqri'bu'l-tehzi'b as well as Al-bidayah wa'l-nihayah that Asma died in 73 hijrah when she was 100 years old. Now, obviously if Asma was 100 years old in 73 hijrah she should have been 27 or 28 years old at the time of hijrah. If Asma was 27 or 28 years old at the time of hijrah, Ayesha should have been 17 or 18 years old at that time. Thus, Ayesha, if she got married in 1 AH (after hijrah) or 2 AH, was between 18 to 20 years old at the time of her marriage.

G. F. Haddad:

Ibn Hajar reports in al-Isaba from Hisham ibn `Urwa, from his father, that Asma' did live 100 years, and from Abu Nu`aym al-Asbahani that "*Asma' bint Abi Bakr was born 27 years before the Hijra, and she lived until the beginning of the year 74.*" None of this amounts to any proof for `A'isha's age whatsoever.

"The Learner":

Tabari in his treatise on Islamic history, while mentioning Abu Bakr reports that Abu Bakr had four children and all four were born during the Jahiliyyah -- the pre Islamic period. Obviously, if Ayesha was born in the period of jahiliyyah, she could not have been less than 14 years in 1 AH -- the time she most likely got married.

G. F. Haddad:

Al-Tabari nowhere reports that "*Abu Bakr's four children were all born in Jahiliyya*" but only that Abu Bakr married both their mothers in Jahiliyya, Qutayla bint Sa`d and Umm Ruman, who bore him four children in all, two each, `A'isha being the daughter of Umm Ruman.

"The Learner":

According to Ibn Hisham, the historian, Ayesha accepted Islam quite some time before Umar ibn Khattab.

G. F. Haddad:

Nowhere does Ibn Hisham say this.

"The Learner":

This shows that Ayesha accepted Islam during the first year of Islam. While, if the narrative of Ayesha's marriage at seven years of age is held to be true, Ayesha should not have been born during the first year of Islam.

G. F. Haddad:

Rather, Ibn Hisham lists `A'isha among "*those that accepted Islam because of Abu Bakr.*" This does not mean that she embraced Islam during the first year of Islam. Nor does it mean that she necessarily embraced Islam before `Umar (year 6) although she was born the previous year (year 7 before the Hijra) although it is understood she will automatically follow her father's choice even before the age of reason.

"The Learner":

Tabari has also reported that at the time Abu Bakr planned on migrating to Habshah (8 years before Hijrah), he went to Mut`am -- with whose son Ayesha was engaged -- and asked him to take Ayesha in his house as his son's wife. Mut`am refused, because Abu Bakr had embraced Islam, and subsequently his son divorced Ayesha (ra).

G. F. Haddad:

Not at all, there is no mention of emigration in Tabari's account of Abu Bakr's discussion with Mut'im. Nor did he ever ask him to take `A'isha because there had been only some preliminary talk, not a formal arrangement. Umm Ruman, Abu Bakr's wife, reportedly said: "*By Allah, no promise had been given on our part at all!*" Rather, al-Tabari said that when news of the Prophet's interest in `A'isha came, he went to see Mut'im. Then Mut'im's wife manifested her fear that her son would become Muslim if he married into Abu Bakr's family. Abu Bakr then left them and gave his assent to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace.

"The Learner":

Now, if Ayesha was only seven years old at the time of her marriage, she could not have been born at the time Abu Bakr decided on migrating to Habshah. On the basis of this report it seems only reasonable to assume that Ayesha had not only been born 8 years before hijrah, but was also a young lady, quite prepared for marriage.

G. F. Haddad:

Your assumption fizzles at the root when you read al-Tabari's positive assertion: "*On the day he consummated the marriage with her she was nine years old.*"

"The Learner":

According to a narrative reported by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, after the death of Khadijah, when Khaulah came to the Prophet advising him to marry again, the Prophet asked her regarding the choices she had in her mind. Khaulah said: "You can marry a virgin (*bikr*) or a woman who has already been married (*thayyib*)". When the Prophet asked about who the virgin was, Khaulah proposed Ayesha's name. All those who know the Arabic language, are aware that the word "*bikr*" in the Arabic language is not used for an immature nine year old girl. The correct word for a young playful girl, as stated earlier is "*Jariyah*". "*Bikr*" on the other hand, is used for an unmarried lady, and obviously a nine year old is not a "lady".

G. F. Haddad:

This is ignorant nonsense, *bikr* means a virgin girl, a girl who has never been married even if her age is 0 and there is no unclarity here whatsoever.

"The Learner":

According to Ibn Hajar, Fatimah was five years older than Ayesha. Fatimah is reported to have been born when the Prophet was 35 years old. Thus, even if this information is taken to be correct, Ayesha could by no means be less than 14 years old at the time of hijrah, and 15 or 16 years old at the time of her marriage.

G. F. Haddad:

Rather, Ibn Hajar mentions two versions: (1) al-Waqidi's narration that Fatima was born when the Prophet was 35; and (2) Ibn `Abd al-Barr's narration that she was born when he was 41, approximately one year more or less before Prophethood, and about five years before `A'isha was born. The latter version matches the established dates. So our Mother `A'isha was nineteen to twenty years younger than her sister Asma' (b. 27 before Hijra-d. 74) and about five years to eight years Fatima's junior.

“The Learner”:

These are some of the major points that go against accepting the commonly known narrative regarding Ayesha's (ra) age at the time of her marriage.

In my opinion, neither was it an Arab tradition to give away girls in marriage at an age as young as nine or ten years, nor did the Prophet marry Ayesha at such a young age. The people of Arabia did not object to this marriage, because it never happened in the manner it has been narrated.

G. F. Haddad:

Those that itch to follow misguidance always resort to solipsisms because they are invariably thin on sources. In this particular case "The Learner" proves to be ignorant and dishonest. It is no surprise he moves on every single point, without exception, from incorrect premises to false conclusions.

“The Learner”:

In the **ISLAMIC REVIEW** we find the following points:

1. The well-known historian Ibn Jareer al-Tabari writes at page 50 of volume 4 of his 'Book of History': "Abu Bakr married two ladies in the days of ignorance (pre-Call era). Fateelah daughter of Abd al-Aza was the first, from whom Abdullah and Asma were born. Umm-i-Rooman was the second, from whom Abd al-Rahman and 'Aishah were born. All the four children of Abu Bakr were born in the days of ignorance (Jahiliyyah, i.e., pre-Islamic days) from the above-named two ladies.

G. F. Haddad:

This is false as already shown.

“The Learner”:

2. It is a well-known fact of history, that Abu Bakr's son Abd al-Rahman fought against the Muslims in the battle of Badr. His age at that time was 21-22 years, and although he was older than 'Aishah, there is no evidence to show that the difference between their ages was more than three or four years. This fact lends support to the view that Hazrat 'Aishah was born four or five years before the Call.

G. F. Haddad:

What nonsense! Abu Bakr's children `Abd Allah, `Abd al-Rahman, Muhammad and Asma` were all born before `A'isha and her birth could have followed that of the last of them by any number of years.

“The Learner”:

3. The well-known historian and scholar Ibn Katheer writes in his 'Al-Badayah' about Sayedah Asma' daughter of Abu Bakr, Asma' died in 73 A.H. at the age of 100 years. She was ten years older than her sister 'Aishah.

G. F. Haddad:

See above.

“The Learner”:

Now according to this report 'Asma' would have been 27-28 years old at the time of Hijrah and since she was ten years older than Sayedah 'Aishah, therefore the age of Sayedah 'Aishah would have been 17 or 18 years at the time of Hijrah. Accordingly, her birth falls about four or five years before the Call, and her age at the time of the consummation of marriage in 2 A.H. will work out to 19-20 years.

G. F. Haddad:

This is all too flimsy as already shown.

“The Learner”:

4. The author of the well-known collection of Hadith 'Mishkat al-Masabeeh', Sheikh Waheed-ud-Deen, writes in his well-known book 'Ahmal fi Asma' al-Rijjal':

"At the time of the consummation of her marriage Sayedah 'Aishah's age was not less than 18-19 years."

G. F. Haddad:

There is no "*Sheikh Waheed-ud-Deen.*" The person you mean is al-Khatib al-Tibrizi himself, whose nickname is Wali al-Din, and whose book *al-Ikmal fi Asma' al-Rijal* received an Urdu translation in the fifties titled: *Ikmal fi asma' al-rijal, mu'allafa-e sahib-i Mishkat, shekh Valiy-al-Din Abi `Abd-Allah Muhammad ibn `Abd-Allah al-Khatib*, tarjuma-e Urdu. [Karachi, Nur-Muhammad: Karkhana-e Tijarat-i-Kutub, 195?].

It is highly unlikely that al-Tibrizi would have said what you attribute to him. He himself adduced in *Mishkat al-Masabih* the hadith of *Sahih Muslim* whereby `Aisha married at seven and cohabited at nine.

“The Learner”:

All the above quotations give ample refutation to the common misconception that Aishah's age at the time of her Nikah was 6 years and at the time of consummation of marriage it was only 9 years. If Muslim scholars of the present era deem fit to make an objective research instead of beating the old track, they will find ample material in the pages of history to arrive at a correct age for Aishah. And Allah the Almighty is the source of truth.

G. F. Haddad:

Objective research shows that the beaten track is right on...and Allah knows best.